

WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES

Monday, April 1, 2024

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority Board of Directors Meeting was called to order by Chair Kevin Bash at 12:30 p.m., in the Board Room at the County of Riverside Administrative Center, 4080 Lemon Street, First Floor, Riverside, California, 92501.

2. ROLL CALL

Board of Directors/Alternates Present

Kevin Jeffries
Karen Spiegel
Chuck Washington
Yxstian Gutierrez
Colleen Wallace
Julio Martinez
Jeff Cervantez
Tony Daddario
Jocelyn Yow
Carole Kendrick

Natasha Johnson
Lesa Sobek
Ed Delgado
Ron Holliday
Kevin Bash
David Starr Rabb
Patricia Lock Dawson
Crystal Ruiz
James Stewart
Joseph Morabito

Board of Directors Absent

V. Manuel Perez
Mark Terry
Leslie Altamirano

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Board Member Lock Dawson.

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ed Sauls, a member of the public, wanted to ask the Board for their help with the Silo Hills Development project in the West Hemet Vernal Pool Complex. There was a grant completed for the purchase of this property that would cover 70% of the purchase price or \$14,000,000. The only thing still required of the grant is the end closing date on the purchase and sale agreement. RCA is currently asking the seller to sign a four-year commitment without any compensation or deposits. The seller is only willing to give RCA to the end of this calendar year. It was requested that the Board authorize staff to grant approval of the purchase and sale agreement that has been executed by the property owner.

5. ADDITIONS / REVISIONS

There were no additions or revisions to the agenda.

- 6. CONSENT CALENDAR** - *All matters on the Consent Calendar will be approved in a single motion unless a Board Member(s) requests separate action on specific item(s).*

M/S/C (Ruiz/Spiegel) to approve the following Consent Calendar items.

6A. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – MARCH 4, 2024

6B. WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY MULTIPLE SPECIES HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN FEE COLLECTION REPORT FOR JANUARY 2024

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) Fee Collection report for January 2024.

6C. JOINT PROJECT REVIEW STATUS REPORT

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Joint Project Review (JPR) monthly status report as of February 29, 2024.

6D. ACQUISITIONS STATUS REPORT

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the acquisition status report as of January 31, 2023.

6E. MONTHLY INVESTMENT REPORT FOR JANUARY 2024

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Monthly Investment Report for the month ended January 31, 2024.

7. STATE AND FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Andrew Sall, Senior Management Analyst, Legislative Affairs, provided an update on state and federal legislative actions. Last month, staff traveled to Sacramento to take part in meetings between the California Habitat Coalition Planning Committee and members of the Legislature and their staff. The purpose of these meetings was to highlight the role of Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) and Natural Community Conservation Plans (NCCPs), such as the MSHCP, in conserving land and protecting endangered species. Staff also advocated against budget cuts to the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) as well as supporting maximizing WCB funding with a direct carveout for NCCPs and HCPs within a proposed climate and natural resources bond.

Staff met several legislative offices, including Assemblymember Corey Jackson, who expressed enthusiasm for RCA's mission to conserve the habitats and landscapes that make the region a wonderful place to live. He also expressed interest in the Coalition's efforts to secure a funding carveout for NCCPs and HCPs within a final bond proposal. RCA also organized a tour for the assemblymember of the Wolfskill Property at his request on March 26th. RCA acquired the

property recently, in part with more than \$4 million dollar award in Section 6 funds and state matching funds. This tour served as an opportunity to showcase the conservation value of the property. The tour was a success and discussions with Assemblymember Jackson continue regarding the opportunity to formally request dedicated funding to NCCPs and HCPs from the climate bond authors.

President Biden signed into law the Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations legislation last month, which includes increased programmatic funding for Federal Section 6 HCP Land Acquisition from \$21 million to \$26 million. Federal investments would need to triple to cover the eligible grants that did not receive awards this cycle. The funding package also includes RCA's request for new report language, requiring the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to provide a report to Congress to identify HCPs larger than 10,000 acres with a federal commitment and the number of federal acres committed and acquired to date, along with the costs to acquire those federal acres. Inclusion of this report language is a victory for RCA and will open doors for continued advocacy, and increased federal funding for plans with federal commitments, such as the MSHCP.

Board Member Johnson wanted to know if there was another HCP larger than 10,000 apart from the MSHCP. Andrew Sall stated that while not aware of any others, there are plenty of similar plan across the state.

Anne Mayer, Executive Director, reiterated that this is something that RCA has asked for repeatedly, a catalogue of plans across the country where the federal government has a financial commitment. The tour of the Wolfskill Property was an informative discussion with the assemblymember, and RCA's legislative actions are starting to have an impact over the past couple years, helping to emphasize the work of the RCA.

Staff continues to closely watch the state budget. Not only does RCA have the advocacy efforts related to having additional funds set aside in the climate bond, but RCA is also advocating that as the state is evaluating where the budget will be but for next year, it is not cut in areas of particular importance to the RCA. The State's 30x30 program, which generates funding for grants that are approved by the WCB, if the state was to cutting funding would have a ripple effect for RCA.

Chair Bash wanted to confirm that as the new Executive Director takes over at RCA, staff will continue to push for that catalogue.

Aaron Hake, Deputy Executive Director, confirmed that staff would continue to pursue the catalogue.

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file an update on state and federal legislative affairs.

8. AUTHORIZATION TO ACQUIRE TAX-DEFAULTED PROPERTIES FROM THE RIVERSIDE COUNTY TREASURER-TAX COLLECTOR AND ADOPTION OF RESOLUTION NO. 2024-002 OBJECTING TO THE PUBLIC SALE

Angela Ferreira, Senior Management Analyst, Right of Way, provided a presentation to Authorize the Acquisition of Tax-Defaulted Property and Adopt Resolution No. 2024-002. In October of 2023, and more recently in March 2024, RCA staff reviewed a list of tax-defaulted properties from the Riverside County Tax Collector's Office consisting of over 200 properties. Staff reviewed each of the properties to determine if the RCA could benefit from acquiring any of the properties for its' conservation efforts.

After careful review, staff determined that only 2 properties would be suitable to move forward with and are in the criteria cells and conscribed for conservation under the MSHCP. One of the properties is in Jurupa Valley and the other is in Temecula.

The first property is owned by Earl Jones and Jones Family Jurupa B Trust and is approximately 5 acres in size. It is located near Pyrite Street in the city of Jurupa Valley. The property is within Criteria Cell 9 and will contribute to Rough Step Unit 1. The sales price is approximately \$1,719, plus any related fees.

The second property is owned by 13 Square Power, LLC and is approximately 5 acres in size. It is located off De Luz Road in the city of Temecula. The property is within Criteria Cell 68A3 and will contribute to Rought Step Unit 5. The sales price is approximately \$70,953, plus any related fees.

In the past year, RCA has successfully acquired 21 parcels via the tax sale process and added 241 acres to the reserve. The Chapter 8 Agreement Process allows a public agency to purchase tax-defaulted property. To initiate this process, the RCA needs to submit a resolution from its' governing body objecting to the public auction sale of the parcels. For a property to fall into the County's tax sale process, the tax payments need to be in arrears for a minimum of 5 years. The County attempts to contact the owners through mail, public notices, and recordation of tax default on the property itself. At any time during the process, the Tax Collector may inform RCA that the property owner has redeemed, or paid taxes and the property will no longer be available for purchase. It is estimated that the current owners will be given the opportunity to redeem or pay back taxes for at least one year from now.

M/S/C (Spiegel/Johnson) to:

- 1) Authorize the acquisition of tax-defaulted properties from the Riverside County Treasurer-Tax Collector for open space for wildlife and plant life conservation in the amount of \$72,672 plus all related fees; and**
- 2) Adopt Resolution No. 2024-002, *"Resolution of the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority Objecting to the Public Sale and Approving the Purchase of Tax-Defaulted Property from the Riverside County Treasurer-Tax Collector"*.**

9. WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY MULTIPLE SPECIES HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

Aaron Gabbe, Regional Conservation Director, provided a presentation on the RCA Annual Report 2022. The annual report provides a formal opportunity to assess the progress of the Plan and to address potential problems. This annual report, once received and filed by the Board, will be available to all MSHCP Permittees, Wildlife Agencies, and interested public on the RCA website. Creating the half-billion-acre reserve system by acquiring 153,000 acres of Additional Reserve Lands (ARL) is one of the RCA's primary responsibilities.

In 2022, the RCA acquired a total of 2,470 acres. Since the inception of the plan through 2022, RCA has acquired 66,595 acres of ARL.

The MSHCP funding partners ARL goals include 97,000 acres for local, 31,000 acres for state and 25,000 acres for federal. The ARL goal for state and federal is to protect a total of 50,000 acres combined, and the split is arbitrary, as the plan does not actually specify how much each entity will contribute to the conservation of the Plan. Another 6,000 acres was added to the state contribution for mitigation for Caltrans and California State projects.

Local acquisition is funding with Local Development Mitigation Funds (LDMF), donations, and other sources. Local sources have funded the acquisition of 41,618 acres or approximately 43% of the 97,000-acre goal. The state has contributed 15,565 acres or approximately 50% of its' 31,000-acre goal. Finally, federal funds have contributed 9,411 acres or approximately 38% of its' 25,000-acre goal. Overall, the RCA is approximately 45% of the way to achieving the 153,000-acre goal.

Overall, the RCA has spent \$559 million to acquire ARL. Close to \$386 million is from local funding, \$105 million is from state funding, and \$68 million is from federal funding.

As soon as staff has completed the Annual Report, the effort to complete the next year's Annual Report begins. As staff has already begun the 2023 Annual Report, there are already some preliminary values to share. In 2023, the RCA acquired 1,530 acres and from the inception of the plan through 2023, has acquired 68,160 acres of ARL.

For 2023, preliminary data shows local sources have funded the acquisition of 42,827 acres or approximately 44% of the 97,000-acre goal, the state has contributed 15,855 acres or approximately 51% of its' 31,000-acre goal, and federal funds have contributed 9,424 acres or approximately 38% of its' 25,000-acre goal. In total, RCA is approximately 45% of the way to the 153,000-acre goal through 2023. The cumulative dollar contribution for land acquisition is \$634 million, with over \$457 million from local, over \$109 million from state, and over \$68 million from federal.

Habitat losses are reported to the RCA once a year by the cities and County. Losses are reported when projects go through their final processes at the city or County and the project is shovel

ready and removal of habitat can occur. In 2022, 4,025 acres were approved for loss within the Plan area, which is 1,403 acres less than 2021. Approximately 3,209 acres of this was for development outside of Criteria Cells, where additional reserve assembly does not occur. Approximately 816 acres was for development inside Criteria Cells where the development was proposed outside of lands needed for additional reserve assembly. Cumulative habitat losses since adoption of Plan show that 81% of the development is occurring outside of the Criteria Cells with 19% occurring within the cells. This is important because most of the Plan is located outside of the Criteria Cells.

New lands were conserved in 2022 in the cities of Calimesa, Hemet, Wildomar, and unincorporated Riverside County. Each jurisdiction has an acquisition goal range, and the information is available on the RCA's public dashboard on RCA's website, which is updated in real time as acquisitions occur.

Losses and gains are evaluated through what the MSHCP calls the Rough Step Analysis. The Rough Step Analysis is a performance measure used to monitor the pace of conservation of specified vegetation communities against the pace of losses in those specified communities. The plan area is split into nine rough step units. The RCA takes the acquisitions and the losses data provided by permittees annually and calculates the rough step formula.

Currently the RCA is out of rough step in three units, 3, 7, and 8. Rough Step Unit 3 is only marginally out of balance by 0.02 acre. The RCA is currently pursuing land acquisitions to rectify the issues in all rough steps units that are out of rough step.

A lot of time is also spent on land management, MSHCP Park staff manage over 45,607 acres. The RCA does not manage all ARL. Management is occurring by the federal and state governments, as well as a suite of long-term management entities like the Resource Conservation Districts, Rivers and Lands Conservancy, and Center for Natural Lands Management. MSHCP Park staff continue to focus on fire abatement, property protection/security; perform initial site inspections of each parcel during acquisition; remove invasive, non-native species and restore natural habitats; coordinate with other reserve managers that oversee non-RCA lands; perform long-term management of 16 Clean Water Act/Endangered Species Act properties; and coordinate with and support Responder Agencies, such as CalFIRE, during active fire incidents on or adjacent to RCA Lands.

Unfortunately, a considerable portion of land management activities is devoted to gate/fence installation or repairs, unauthorized activities including Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) riders, illegal dumping, homeless encampments, target shooting, unauthorized trail creation by mountain bikers and OHV riders, and the interdiction of illegal marijuana grows on RCA lands. In 2022, Park staff contacted 256 OHV riders or groups of riders. Park staff removed an estimated 16 tons of trash; significantly increased from the 6 tons of refuse removed in 2021.

A four-acre part of the Cornerstone Donation property was treated for non-native species and restored with native coastal sage scrub species to restore this portion of the property after historic disking impacts. The highly invasive stinknet was targeted and removed within the burn

scar following the Stowe Fire, which burned a portion of the RCTC Dilworth #2 property in 2021. This program allowed San Jacinto Valley Crownscale and Davidson's Saltscale to thrive in the absence of the highly competitive stinknet.

The RCA contracts the Santa Ana Watershed Association (SAWA) to perform the biological monitoring aspects of the MSHCP. With a staff of 16, the program monitors 146 species throughout the reserve system that includes both Public Quasi-Public (PQP) and ARL lands. In 2022, activities included: focused monitoring for Los Angeles Pocket Mouse, Tricolored Blackbird, Turkey Vulture, and Western Pond Turtle; Quino Checkerspot Butterfly and Delhi Sands Flower-loving Fly surveys were also conducted, these are conducted annually; and rare plant surveys were conducted that included the Engelmann Oak tree recruitment analysis at the Santa Rosa Plateau, and the Brand's Phacelia population study at the Santa Ana River, this population of Brand's Phacelia is very important, as it is the last remaining known population of this species within the Plan area.

The monitoring program also performs monitoring of the use of the Clinton Keith Road Overcrossing. Completion of the overcrossing was in fall 2018. This year marks the fourth year of monitoring that is to go for a total of five years. This monitoring is supported by the Riverside County Transportation Department. The purpose of the overcrossing was to support movement of Quino Checkerspot Butterfly as well as providing movement of habitat across the roadway by the threatened Coastal California Gnatcatcher. Several species of butterflies have been detected but, so far, no Quino Checkerspot Butterfly. The MSHCP covered species most regularly detected were coyote, bobcat, and black-tailed jackrabbit.

Board Member Holliday wanted clarification on the state and federal goals that were listed as they were different for 2022 versus 2023. Aaron Gabbe noted this was an excellent catch, and while the labels on the graph were incorrect, the percentages listed were not.

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan 2022 Annual Report.

10. BOARD OF DIRECTORS / EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Anne Mayer, Executive Director, announced that this week letters would be going out to City Managers, County Administrative Officers, City/County Planning and Finance Directors, and most everyone on the RCA mailing list informing them of the rate changes for the Local Development Mitigation Funds (LDMF) going into effect on July 1st. Staff will continue communication efforts with each jurisdiction to make sure everyone is aware the rate will go up on July 1st. The increased amount is based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in the area, which is a 2.878% increase this year.

Next month, in May, the Board will be visiting the budget for the next fiscal year and in the Executive Director seat will be Aaron Hake. Effective May 2nd, Aaron Hake will be the Executive Director of RCTC as well as RCA.

Anne Mayer thanked the RCA Board for its' commitment to the MSHCP, it is a labor of love. The MSHCP is not easy to implement or manage, but with the vision of the elected officials in this County so many years ago, and a willingness to continue that vision, so much has been accomplished. It has been rewarding to be a part of this, and it is appreciated that several years ago there was confidence in the RCTC team to step in and manage the RCA.

Chair Bash thanked Anne Mayer, being here during the transition to RCTC was a lot of fun and enjoyable, most days. There are a few Board Members that have been around for quite some time and the improvements were quite dramatic.

This weekend, there were two equestrians who lost their horses and the effort put forward by the Deputies, Fire Fighters, and the Norco Animal Rescue Team (NART) has been incredible.

Board Member Spiegel concurred with Chair Bash and added that Anne Mayer has been an asset and will be sorely missed. Gratitude was conveyed for Anne's years of service to the county and beyond.

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12. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business for consideration by the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority Board of Directors, Chair Bash adjourned the meeting at 1:12 p.m. The next meeting of the Board of Directors is scheduled to be held on **Monday, May 6, 2024.**

Respectfully submitted,



Lisa Mobley
Administrative Services Director/
Clerk of the Board